

Get Real! Do Not Judge

Matthew 7:1-6

Mark Vroegop

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces (Matt 7:1-6).

Jesus wants religion that is real. And as he looked around at the state of spirituality in Israel, he was appalled. As so often is the case, the community of faith had drifted from God's original design. Formalized and cultural religion created a religious veneer which hid major problems, and that is why Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:3), "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted" (Matt 5:4), and "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt 5:8).

Religion lost its way, and Jesus aims to bring it back from the brink. He wants the people to **get real**. And that is why he takes obedience to an entirely different level: to the heart. He says that murder is not the only problem – anger is too (Matt 5:21-26), and he says that adultery actually starts in the heart with a lustful look (Matt 5:27-30).

Real righteousness is not just about actions; motives must be right. Religious people should "beware of practicing ... righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them..." (Matt 6:1). Giving (6:2-4, 19-24), prayer (6:5-15), fasting (6:16-18), and goals (6:25-34) must be performed for the right reasons or the spiritual practice is worthless and potentially idolatrous. Jesus wants a righteousness that is genuine.

The Sermon on Mount (Matt 5-7) is Jesus' explanation of real religion. We began this series in June, and so far we've covered the following:

- The Ethics of Grace in the Beatitudes (5:1-16)
- Sins of the Heart (5:17-20)
- Motives Matter (6:1-34)

Chapter seven marks the final lap in our study of this great sermon. The final three messages are:

- "Do Not Judge" (7:1-6)
- "Expect Good Things from God" (7:7-11)
- "Only a Few are Truly Saved" (7:12-29)

Our text this morning covers the subject of judging. This is a very important subject because Matthew 7:1 is one of the most frequently quoted verses by people outside the church. I'm sure you heard it said with a snarl and sarcasm – "Don't judge let you be judged." But it is important for another reason. The sin of judgmentalism is far too common in the body of Christ. Religious people are prone to be guilty of a nasty tones, condescending looks, and condemning words. So this issue is important for at least two reasons. To address this touchy subject Jesus uses a familiar teaching formula: command, warning, and solution.

A Cautious Command: Judge Judgingly

Jesus' command is straightforward and simple: Don't judge. It may be that Jesus intends to say that they need to stop judging as if they are already doing it, or it may be that he wants them to avoid judgmentalism in the future.¹ Regardless, Jesus is probably warning his disciples about being or becoming like the religious leaders who were guilty of judging.

What is Jesus addressing here? The word "judge" means to separate, to choose, to distinguish between. As we will see in a minute, the word does not always have a negative meaning. There is some judgment that is good, helpful, and even commanded. However, the kind of judgment that Jesus has in mind relates to unfair, unloving, and condemning judgments.

Sinful judgment comes from an attitude of spiritual superiority and pride, and it expresses itself in ultimate judgments about who people are or what they will do. It fails to realize the human limitations in seeing life, people, and situations clearly. It assumes too much, and it is dangerous.

Therefore, sinful judging is pridefully putting myself in God's place regarding the evaluation of others. Dave Swavely in his book "Who are You to Judge?" defines judging this way:

¹ The present imperative prohibition often implies that one must stop what has already begun. However, sometimes the activity of action is more nuanced. Regardless, the point about judgmentalism is the same: don't do it!

“The sin of judging is negatively evaluating someone’s conduct or spiritual state on the basis of nonbiblical standards or suspected motives. To judge others is to decide that they are doing wrong because they do something the Bible doesn’t talk about or because you can guess what is in their heart.”²

We find a great example of this is in Luke 18:9-12:

9 He also told this parable to some who **trusted in themselves** {emphasis mine} that they were righteous, and **treated others with contempt** {emphasis mine}: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'

Notice the expressed gratitude to God while expressing disdain for others. Where does this come from? Verse nine gives us the answer. Sinful judgment involves two sins: pride and contempt. We are not to play God by rendering final judgment on people as if we know God’s final verdict on their lives.³ We are to remember Proverbs 21:2 – “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart.” Jesus is talking about a proud heart that demonstrates itself in a critical spirit, a rigid, penalizing judgmentalism. This kind of judgmentalism sees the faults of others more easily and clearly than our own. It is to trust in ourselves (our own righteousness) and treat others with contempt (as less than us).

Judgmentalism has many forms and it probably sounds a bit too familiar. It happens when we make assumptions about people because of their past or when we make blanket statements about a who a person is (e.g., “He’s never going to change”, “She has always been full of herself”, “I know why she did that”). Judgmentalism is a subtle tone that can show up in how we ask questions (e.g., “Was he late again?”, “Did you see what Jane wore today?”, “Can you believe the let their kids do that?”). And it is also at the heart of racism (e.g., White people are so _____, Black people are _____, Hispanics are so _____, etc.)

The command about judging is not a retreat from absolute truth or courage to call something or someone out for what they are doing. Some people think that this verse commands no judging at all, as if the Bible’s ethic is relativistic and non-absolute. In other words, some might think that this verse precludes any evaluation of a person’s life or identifying that certain actions are wrong. This often how the verse is used – to back off a truth claim. In this case, people use this verse to claim that identifying someone’s actions as sinful and calling them to account for it is judging. That is not the case for two reasons:

² Dave Swavely, What are You to Judge – The Dangers of Judging and Legalism, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishers), 8.

³ Fredrick Bruner, The Christbook – Matthew 1-12, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), 337.

1) Matthew 7:6 advocates for discernment, a form of judgment ("Don't throw your pearls before pigs"). Jesus ends this teaching with a word of caution against naïveté. He warns about continually taking the message of the Bible to those who adamantly reject it. Believers are commanded to be loving, forgiving, and slow to judgment; but they are also called to be discerning with certain people and not indefinitely proclaim the gospel to those who are hostile to it. They should judge when it is time to move on.⁴ So Jesus calls for discernment just after warning about judgmentalism. It is a rare qualification.

2) The Bible frequently commands that righteous judgment should be made. Two examples:

11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." (1 Cor 5:11-13)

The passage is very clear. The church is supposed to judge – to lovingly discern those whose sinful actions are harmful on the body. To not judge is to be guilty of pride (see 1 Cor 5:2).

The church is commanded to not tolerate those who claim the name of Christ but fail to follow Christ. At College Park we practice church discipline because it is the loving thing to do for those who are trapped in sin, and because we are commanded to judge.

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (Matt 18:15-17).

Therefore, we are called to judge judgently. The problem is not with judging; it is with the attitude behind the judgment. There is ditch of toleration on either side. On the one side is the ditch of intolerance where we pridefully take the place of God in evaluating people. On the other side is the ditch of overtolerance where we pridefully act as if sinful behavior or a departure of truth doesn't matter. Pride is the root of both; but it is expressed differently.

So we must judge judgently. We must be godly but not God-like in our judgments.

Warning: You Will Be Judged

There is a very clear warning attached to this command. Jesus warns us that sinful judgment will return upon the one who is guilty. It is a righteous boomerang; a taste of your own

⁴ See note in ESV Study Bible for Matthew 7:6

medicine so to speak. Judgmental people will receive “in kind” judgment from God. What does this mean?

First, there is no escaping God’s judgment. Verse one (“Don’t judge that you be not judged”) doesn’t mean that those who are innocent of judging will not be judged **at all** by God. The Bible clearly tells us that every person will have to stand before the judgment of God.

“Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; 11 for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom 14:10-12)

So verse one must be taken in context of the rest of the Bible. We will all stand before God for judgment. But the judgment on judges will be different.

Secondly, the judgment on judgmentalism is unique and painful. Jesus says the same thing two different ways: “For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (7:3). God takes the method and rigidity that the judgmental used to evaluate others, and he uses it on them. In other words, harsh people receive harsh judgment from God. What a scary thought to think that an all-powerful, all-knowing God would use the unfair standards of sinful human beings as the bar. God is using your standard for righteousness! This is not a good thing, especially when he turns it on you.

Third, God’s aim is to expose our hypocrisy. Why would God use our own judgment as a means of judgment on us? There can only be one reason: to expose the utter foolishness and unfairness of our hypocritical judgment of other people. Getting a taste of your own medicine is humiliating moment.

Jesus uses the warning to think twice about what we think, say, and conclude about others. He wants us to realize that judgment is coming to all of us, and we would be foolish to think that God doesn’t take note of our self-made, harsh and unfair standards. If you want to play God in this lifetime just beware that one day the real God may make you play by your own rules. And good luck with that.

Solution: Judge yourself

To make the point even stronger, Jesus uses one of his best illustrations in the Bible, one that humorously sets us up. There are two parts to the story.

First, he attacks our hypocritical lack of personal awareness. We see other people’s sins more clearly than our own even when ours are much larger. Jesus envisions us seeing something small in a brother’s eye. The word used for “speck” implies something that is very small like a

splinter or a small piece of straw. The word used for “log” refers to a large beam of a house or a large piece of timber used to secure a door. And the illustration highlights the fact that you see **very clearly** the speck in the other person’s eye despite a problem: you have a beam protruding out of your head!

Jesus tells us this so that we will see ourselves the way that we really are. He wants to see how easy it is to see the sins of other people without seeing enormous problems in our own lives. We need to admit that we tend to give ourselves much more grace than we give others. Even though we know the motives our hearts and we don’t know the motives of others – we are quick to justify ourselves and condemn others. It ought to be the other way, but pride prevents it.

Secondly, Jesus attacks our hypocritical offer to help others. Verse four show us what so often happens: we not only see the short-comings of others more clearly; we think that they need more help than we do. Mark it down! Judgmental people are usually very busy because there is so much of the world that needs their help. They confront, complain, suggest, offer opinions, make suggestions, provide their assessment while never considering a careful look in the spiritual mirror. Ministry to others is about their need to help others become like them rather than an overflow of God’s grace. Hypocritical helpers love fixing people but they fail to see the damage that they do.

The real problem is that the log obstructs their vision. They can’t see clearly, and because of that it makes them ineffective. And that is why Jesus says, “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (7:5). Notice that Jesus is not against helping. He is just against helping others when you don’t deal with yourself first.

So the solution is very apparent: judge yourself first! Know who you are really like. Have a healthy understanding of your own depravity. Come to grips with your inadequacy. See the log in your eye. Be humble or you will never judge correctly nor will you be helpful to others.

We have to judge ourselves. Do you understand what that means? Let me give you a number of applications:

- You must begin with an understanding of your spiritual need in Christ. The gospel – that Jesus came to die for sinners – is the starting point of dealing with judgmentalism. You will never see people clearly until you understand your own sin and its remedy in Jesus
- You have to know your own heart through the Word of God. The heart is deceitful and you’ll never be able to see clearly without the plumb line of the Bible.
- Deal with judgmental thoughts and attitudes quickly and mercilessly. They will grow if you let them take root.

- When in conflict, start by fully owning your contribution.
- You cannot help anyone change when your heart is full of self-justifying thoughts. "Only wounded healers have a right to heal."⁵
- Stand up for what is right but be humble about your own failures and limitations.
- When someone points out a weakness or a fault, be grateful that God is exposing your specks and logs.
- Remember, one day everything is settled at the feet of Jesus – the eternal heart-knower. And on that day you will be so glad that Jesus paid it all!

Jesus call us to judge carefully. He calls us to not sell out on the truth – we're commanded to judge. But on the other hand, he calls us to not set ourselves up as God. There is a difference between judgmentalism and discernment.

The world has seen enough spiritual hypocrisy couched in judgmentalism. We don't need any more of that. What we need are humble people, who are saved by grace, transfixed with the glory of God, and amazed at God's love; people who see the needs of others clearly because they see their own needs so profoundly.

Judge carefully by judging yourself first!

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⁵ Bruner, 339.